DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 180 HE 001 408

AUTHOR	Abram, Morris B.
TITLE	[The University in Crisis.]
INSTITUTION	College Entrance Examination Board, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	Oct 69
NOTE	9p.; Address delivered to the Annual Meeting of the College Entrance Examination Board, New York, N.Y., Oct. 27-28, 1969
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.55
DESCRIPTORS	*Activism, Administrator Responsibility, Educational Responsibility, Faculty, *Governance, *Higher Education, *Institutional Role, *Private Colleges, Relevance (Education), Social Change, Student Alienation, Student Behavior

ABSTRACT

The university reflects the revolution in the world. Large numbers of "find out" students are not goal oriented and are affected by malaise; many approve of the use of violence in certain situations. Part of the revolution must be accepted and part rejected. The university is extremely vulnerable to violence and, unless it is contained, American private education may come to a grinding halt. The university cannot be neutral; it is committed to education and to gradual ameliorative change. It must try to be neutral, however, and not be allowed to bend toward a particular ideology. The liberal arts college, especially, is responsible for educating the student as a whole man and helping him find his way in society. The American university cannot be democratic if it is to be an educational institution. Much is wrong with the university: faculty has enormous power, much of it negative and rarely innovative, the publish or perish syndrome is detrimental to good teachers who do not publish, the tenure system is rigid, and authority fragmented. The one centrifugal force is central budgeting. This must be maintained. Many students are dissatisfied, some want to shut the university down others want to change it. They must be listened to, but the university has a responsibility to preserve its own vital elements. For the good of society, the university must survive. (AF)

ED037180

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD
Annual Meeting, New York City
October 27-28, 1969

ADDRESS BY MORRIS B. ABRAM, PRESIDENT, BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

When I was at the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins was the president. The other day Robert Hutchins wrote to me and asked me to come to a conference in Rome. He is holding conferences everywhere. He seems to have no world of scarcity since he left the University of Chicago.

I wrote back that I couldn't attend, and I said: "One of the reasons I can't is because you failed to instruct me properly when I was at the University of Chicago. You taught me a lot of things, but you didn't give me sense enough not to become a college president."

He wrote back and he said: "There are some things you have to learn for yourself."

I happen to believe that the universities of this country are the victims of a profound revolution which is shaking American life, and, indeed, if some of you have read Joe Califano's recent book, "The Student Revolution, A Global Confrontation," I think you will realize that the problems are not limited either to our universities or those of the West, but exist around the world. Joe Califano denominates the crisis as a crisis of belief, and I am bound to agree with him.

It is hard to contemplate the fact, but it is a fact that the University of Tokyo has been ineffective for one year and not one single graduate in medicine has been turned out by that distinguished university's pool of medical resources in the East in the last year.

It is also a fact that the University of Osaka has been closed for long periods of time, and this, of course, has happened without any Vietnam war being waged by the Japanese.

I say the world is in revolution. Thus far the revolution has been somewhat obscured because it has been relatively bloodless. It would be my contention that part of this revolution is going to be and should be accepted; already it is being absorbed into our life styles, into our modes of thinking and patterns of living. Consider the current modes of thinking that have to do with honesty or lack of hypocrisy, or personal taste. Look at the changes in dress and in habits and manners, and most especially at the changes in the right of the individual to express himself more fully than he could some years ago. The Supreme Court of the United States has clearly changed its views--and I think for the better--in the area of personal conduct, and in the area of pornography and obscenity.

I think that many of the students of my generation were in universities for the purpose of being what I shall call -- for the lack of a better name -- trade-off students. Trade-off students came to the university not for the purpose of a structured education; they came in order to engage in that kind of adult hedonism which was not allowed outside of the university gates. Thus the raccoon coats, the hip flasks, the fraternal frolics.

HE001408

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Today in most of the good institutions of higher learning, we no longer see this type of student; his place on the stage has been preempted by another kind of student whom I chose to call the find-out student. Find-out students are in college for the perfectly legitimate purpose of trying to find out what to do with their lives, and the university is a proper place in which to do that.

Large numbers of find-out students are frustrated and disappointed. They are not yet goal-oriented, they have not yet found their way, and they are affected with a kind of malaise. I suspect that 20 per cent of students at Cornell, which this morning's New York Times says approve of violence in certain situations -- and I do not think the situations justify violence -- I suspect these students are find-out students.

Let us take the students at Brandeis University. Some 70 per cent of Brandeis students move on either to professional schools or to graduate education. Not all of them enter Brandeis with these distinct goals in mind, but while at college, they find a commitment. And we are told by the psychiatrists that once the adolescent finds a commitment, the wide swings of emotion, the emotional turmoil sometimes extending over into violence, are brought under a kind of adult control. But the find-out student, while he has not yet discovered a goal, is the student who in large measure has been responsible for this current revolution in society.

Part of this revolution I think must be accepted and absorbed, but I firmly believe that part must be rejected if free institutions and the liberal society as we know it are to survive.

My impression -- now confirmed by the ACE computers -- has been that if there exists a common thread, between the tendency toward violence and turmoil on the campus and any other factor, it seems to be high selectivity in admissions. As a result of intensive surveys, the computers told us last year that 85 per cent of the institutions of higher learning in this country with very high admissions standards had had serious disruptions.

Now, the trouble is that, in my judgment, a university is extremely vulnerable to disruption, and it happens to be my peculiar prejudice, if it is not my judgment, that unless these disruptions can somehow be prevented or contained, American private education may be coming to a grinding halt. We must have higher institutions of learning supported by public funds, but there is no necessity or guarantee from the societal sense that private education at a high quality level, as we know it, must continue. This continues at sufferance and is greatly endangered by some of the uglier aspects of this new revolution. I would like to discuss for a few minutes why it is so difficult for institutions such as universities and colleges to contain these disruptions.

First of all, we have a rather distorted notion in this country that the university is some kind of sanctuary. But the university is part of society, public and private. It is no more exempt from society's laws against disruption than your homes, your private associations and your clubs, and this notion that has grown up that somehow or other police and their intervention in turmoil is something only for poor people and something from which middle-class kids are exempt and middle class professors are exempt, I suggest to you, is morally wrong and legally indefensible.

However, it is also a fact that we must live in a certain climate of campus opinion. In most universities the employment of outside force generally leads to a kind of polarization. This is a fact that we must accept, and a fact that we must take into account, and it must have some influence upon our decisions.

As I see them, the issues which have confronted private education and public education in this last year are issues which deserve extremely serious examination, but I want to suggest to you that the university, as the site of rationed resources and limited options, is not completely free to deal with all of these issues, because our hands are tied.

Let us take an issue which the radicals raise in such strident terms, the issue of the university as a neutral institution. Here I wish to enter a public confession of error.

I said last September in my inaugural address: The university is a neutral forum. It is a neutral place. I was rather colorful about it. I said, the purpose of the university is to hold a soapbox steady so that faculty and outside speakers and occasionally administrators could mount it and have their say, but that the university was neutral. I have learned a lot in this last year. I have learned a lot from faculties, from students, and from administrators. I have learned a lot by trying to examine the issues and the evidence -- as a lawyer should. The university is not a neutral place. The university cannot be a neutral place. It is committed to something. It is committed first of all to education. It is also committed to gradual ameliorative change and reform, and it takes an optimistic view of society, not a cynical view that could lead to revolution.

A university may be the habitation of revolutionary men and women, and so long as their overt conduct does not destroy or impinge upon the rights of others, the university should be a hospitable place to them. However, the university cannot be committed to revolution. It cannot be neutral about that. Nor is the university ever neutral, even about what it teaches, because everything the university as a corporate organism does, it does through men. I have tried too many cases before too many juries and seen too many judges not to know that man cannot be an objective calculating machine. Everything we know and everything we believe derives from a lifetime of experiences strained and filtered through our personalities from birth.

But this does not mean that the university has no obligation to try to be neutral. The institution in our society which has that obligation in a very advanced form is the court, but I know of no judge who is really, truly neutral. That doesn't mean the judicial system should be brought down or should be changed into the Nazi or Soviet system. The judge takes an oath to try to be neutral, and if you read the opinion of a Holmes or a Brandeis or a Stone or a Hughes, you will see how these men strived and struggled to be neutral. And so must the university.

However, I would reject out of hand any attempt by the radical students or the misinformed and misguided students, radicals or otherwise, to say that because the university cannot possibly be completely neutral that it ought to be bent and tilted towards this form of ideology. That is the road to death and to doom, and would mean the end of the university as we know it.

We have just come through this whole issue with respect to the Vietnam moratorium. I was in favor of the moratorium. I am opposed to the Vietnam war. Ninety per cent of the faculty was opposed, and 98 per cent -- I will almost give the Ivory Soap figure, 99.44 per cent -- were opposed to the Vietnam war on my campus. But in my judgment the university as a corporate matter had no right to say that the professors who felt otherwise could not teach or that students who felt otherwise could not go to class.

The university must not be made into an inhospitable, hostile place with a point of view of political questions, for this would mean that those who have other views are placed in a position which, to say the least, is unenviable. I went to the University of Georgia back in the 30s, and I know how out of place I felt and how out of place and sometimes out of jobs professors were who were opposed to the party line of segregation at all costs.

Another issue which makes the university so vulnerable today is this cry of relevance. When students come to me and say, the university must have a curriculum which is relevant, I say to them, that is an incomplete sentence. Relevant to what?

In my judgment, vocational schools have a job of being relevant to the vocation which is being taught and must help the student achieve the goals of that vocation. But the liberal arts college, it seems to me, has the responsibility of being relevant to the education of the student as a whole man in an attempt to help him find his way and to continue his education once he has left the college gates. The university must be relevant to education. The educated student makes his knowledge relevant to his life. I think for the university to try to be much more than that is, again, to distort its mission.

I grew up during the days of the depression. The students don't like to hear me say this because they don't ever like to take their telescopes and look back at the depression. They want to look through the magnifying end of the telescope at today's problems. They don't even want to take the telescope and look forward to the future either. They always want to look through the one end of the telescope that magnifies today.

However, I remember the depression and I remember the 11 million unemployed, and I remember the 4 million unemployed in Great Britain, and I know that John Maynard Keynes was sitting in Kings College, Cambridge, with his pencil and paper. There was poverty and hunger all around, and I am sure that had Baron Keynes been faced with some of the colleagues he would have been faced with today, and with today's fervent and dedicated students, he would have been pressed to lead a kiddy corps, to diaper the kids of working mothers in Cambridge. What a waste that would have been. His investigations and formulae resulted in the publication of a book, The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money, which conquered the monster of worldwide depression, and so what he was doing was relevant to the mission of Kings College in Cambridge University. It would be a great waste of resources if all of our intellects and energies were riveted upon the current problems and human tragedies that we see all around us today. But to these cries and these felt needs and the anger and frustration and the malaise that result from the kind of world which we live in -- and it is a pretty sorry world, a world that could be so much better, particularly in the United States, since we have the resources -- to all of these cries and this anger and anguish and feeling of loneliness and alienation which all of you know so well and so deeply, so sincerely, the university is a sitting duck.

It is a sitting duck because, first of all, it is a free institution. It must arouse the widest variety of opinion and comment and action. But there is one thing I have learned, if I have learned anything this year. The American university cannot be a democratic institution if it is to be an educational institution. You cannot have decisions by student bodies and by uninformed faculties as to the relative value of a man who is searching for the riddle of DNA, as compared to the value of having 10 professors working in the urban ghetto, and if decisions are made on that basis, I can assure you that the application of resources would go to that which is popular rather than that which may be seminal. And if decisions on the curriculum and other matters were made by popular majority in universities, I would suggest to you that in such a climate of intolerance we would deny resources to, and might even expel, some of the people who are speaking the truth, for even today some truths may be quite unpopular, with even the educated.

Let us never forget that. Let us never forget that Copernicus was spurned. Copernicus had the nerve to challenge the church and all the scientists of his age. He also had the nerve to challenge his own eyesight and the eyesight of other human beings, and he paid his price, because he said that the sun stands still in the heavens and the earth moves, and everybody felt he was possessed by witchcraft or heresy because everybody could see the sun move each day and nobody felt the earth move.

The only point about it was that Copernicus was right, and the rest, the popular opinion, was wrong.

So the universities must be kept free and open institutions, but they cannot be democratic. Thus, they can be made to appear by the radical student as authoritarian, which they are not, but they must be authoritative if they are to be universities.

The governance of universities is difficult. Straight-line authority is completely out. Cost analysis and all of the rules of business--and some of these universities are very big businesses indeed--cannot operate. The faculty has huge power, largely negative, but so infrequently innovative. The faculty bears this negative power but does not bear the responsibility for the life and continuance of the institution. It properly controls the curriculum, as it must, but so frequently shows an inclination also to prize the curriculum as it now is. The faculty controls appointments, as it must, but so frequently it fails to reward those parts of the university's teaching mission which are so vital and needed to shape students into human beings.

I say to you--with some trepidation, but with conviction--that the old rule of "publish or perish" must give way. Publication is sometimes done only to increase the body of what must be learned rather than to add to the body of knowledge. May I suggest to you that a new and proper formulation should be, "publish and prosper, teach and prosper, publish and teach and prosper doubly." The students are demanding, and the universities require people who are not only scholars but teachers. If I may be so bold I should like to add, teachers who are institution-oriented and who carry their share of the burden in the governance of the universities, not just in times of crisis or when their own freedoms are threatened, but day by day.

I know full well the arguments that unless a man continues to do research and continues to think actively, even though he may be a brilliant teacher, he may become a sleeping volcano, and indeed he may. God bless the man who researches and writes and

teaches. But may I suggest to you that there are many men who do not put pen to paper well but whose minds are active and far-ranging and growing deeper and broader and wider and who can communicate with students. Though they are men of the highest quality and the greatest intellectual vigor, many of them are being denied tenured slots in these times of scarcity in favor of those who add to the body of what is to be learned.

Now, these are not original views. Whitehead, who knew something about this, wrote in his Aims of Education that there are some people who communicate best in direct contact with other human minds and who never write, and he said, to use his words, "They sleep amongst the innumerable unknown benefactors of mankind when their current generation of students has passed away. Fortunately, one of them is immortal. His name is Socrates."

But may I also suggest to you that one of the problems of governance of the university in the time of revolution and crisis is tenure, and whenever I say that, everybody stares. I believe in it. I believe in tenure for a variety of reasons. I know all of the academic and societal arguments for it and, in fact, I would like to have it myself. But may I say this to you. The present rules for tenure did not come down from Mount Sinai, written on tablets of stone, and in this day of scarcity, because of the "up or out" rule, too many universities are losing bright young men who would like to stay a few years longer. There is no reason on earth why the tenure decision must take place at the associate professor level and cannot take place at a different level. There is no reason on earth why a man of 35 must obtain a lifetime contract or feel that without it he is disgraced forever. Students are being denied teachers with whom they have a close association by virtue of the fact that a tenure slot may not be available at the time that decision has to be made about them. There is no such thing as involuntary servitude in the university, and there should be some flexibility in these rules.

Now, let me say a word about the students. I think in most institutions students have very little power, and they sometimes exercise it irresponsibly when they do have it. My own feeling about students is that I have never known a generation which is brighter, more committed, more moral in some fundamental although unconventional sense, than this group. But let me make this clear. The students are adolescents, and adolescents are subject to wide swings in emotion. Today they may be exercised about some issue and tomorrow they disappear as the issue evaporates. Very few of them have the capability to deal with the fundamental problems of day-to-day management, or the time to learn the necessary facts to effectively assist in the governance of the universities. But their input should be taken into account, and I am struggling with all my heart to take the best of what they have to offer without distorting the institution to the point that it is ungovernable.

I come to say what I believe to be the absolute sine qua non of university governance. In a world in which there is so much turmoil, in which the center of the turmoil is located among the young--and we have almost eight million of them at the colleges and universities--it appears to me that the universities must be able, somehow or other, to contain the storm. We must be able to fulfill our obligations to the youth who will in the next ten years govern this nation.

This is a very responsible position we have. I have suggested to you that because of the fragmentation of authority and the lack of straight-line authority and our inability to fire, and our inability to do much more than cajole, we have very weak institutions. Unless we want to rely upon the courts and police, God forbid, or Congress--God forbid even more--somewhere we must find the necessary tools in order to deal with the problem.

The one centrifugal force in this whole area is central budgeting and the control of the administration over that budgeting. Now, I know there are some bad university administrators and some bad presidents, but as President Kingman Brewster of Yale said, they are accountable to boards of trustees. If this power of central budgeting, which is the only centrifugal force, is compromised, the university may very well just come apart at the seams. It must be maintained--subject to accountability.

I said at the beginning, and I say again, it is not by any means sure that the private university will survive this crisis. Only four or five universities I know of have the resources to survive at the present level of excellence if the turmoil continues, and yet I believe the survival of the private university is critical. The survival of public institutions is even more critical, but I have confidence they will survive. State legislators will never let their children and their neighbors' children go without an education. However, lately, the SDS has been saying very frankly, "Shut it down. Shut it down. Shut it down." And to the turmoil there has come reaction from the private sector and the foundations, "Well, let's starve it down." Shut it down, or starve it down, it still is the same thing. It comes down to the same thing.

I used to be somewhat involved in politics. I believe with all my heart that this country is not politically in a prerevolutionary or revolutionary stage in the leftist direction, as the students think. This country has a right-wing tilt, and it is growing righter and righter and righter. The students who are chasing mad and foolish delusions are injuring one of the most precious institutions that they have for their own development. I can prove it to you.

The university is in crisis because society is in crisis. The activists on the campus see the crisis in sharper terms because they are young and they must live with it longer, and to some it looks unendurable. Moreover, these young activists have had less experience in living with the unthinkable and shrugging off the human tragedy that we see always around us. The students feel that the university is the first thing that is theirs in society. They wish to change it. They wish to govern it. But the last thing in the world many of them wish is to be governed by it.

They give obeisance to the mission of structured learning by frenzied efforts to be admitted to the structured learning processes, but once they enter, they cry out against the intellectualism in a great burst of romantic escapism. They reject the university as a moral tutor, but they seek to use it as their own moral instrument. However, these students are the nation's hope of tomorrow, as they are the troubled and troubling inhabitants of the university today.

We must somehow engage them, and understand them, but most important we must preserve the vital elements of the university for their own sakes.

We must listen to what the best of them are saying. There are dreadful things stalking this planet--over-population, famine, war, and the threat of ultimate destruction--but the university must not be so pretentious as to think it can solve these problems by itself. The university cannot exorcise these looming disasters. We are weak lancers to tilt with the problems of this universe. We can only furnish ideas and personnel to be of assistance. But as we look with our students--and we should--at these problems on the outside, let us not neglect the university. Because if the university becomes something else, we will still face these problems, but with diminished resources and commitment to deal with them.

I do not, by any means, think the universities are perfect. I think some of the things we do are perfectly dreadful. I think it is absolutely absurd that, so far as I know, in this day when there is a demand that grading be abolished, I cannot, Mr. Chairman, find any rational controlled experiment about grading which is worthy of much trust. I find I must rely on my own prejudices that grading is a useful learning tool. I am unwilling to abolish it, because I know that it was the means by which I was forced to tie together in comprehensives at Oxford what I had learned over a period of two years. So I am committed to it.

One hundred years ago we knew what the core curriculum for the educated man was. Today we flounder around. We haven't the foggiest idea as we present a whole supermarket of choices. Where is the research? Have we been asleep? Are we investigating everybody else's problems but our own? I think here the charge must be made against those who are in control of the curriculum rather than the administrators, who generally are the real sources of innovation and the committed problem solvers.

Whoever said it requires four years to earn a B.A. degree? I see these students at Brandeis who have these tremendous test scores carry their four-course loads and have an opportunity to carry a ten-course load in activism on the outside--and I wonder.

If I remember correctly, President Edward Levi of the University of Chicago said in his Inaugural Address that the graduate schools have curricula that could be easily compressed upon the undergraduate schools in most institutions.

Maybe this course would force students to make a commitment early and thus end adolescence in the psychiatric-psychosexual scale of development. The trouble is we flounder. Faculties are diffused. Administrators have lost their credibility. People are full of guilt and anguish. So many of those who are most inventive on the faculty and have bright and agile minds are out adopting students' causes as if they were really adopting student welfare, which are two different things.

There is generally a dissipation of the power of the administration to use central budgeting as the tool to get the institutions moving. I want to leave you only with this message.

After a year as a president, I am now prepared to say this: I have a heavy responsibility which cannot be discharged in the expectation of winning any popularity contest, and I intend, and I think most college presidents now intend, to discharge it. We may become among the innumerable unthanked benefactors of mankind, because what we must do to hold these institutions together and to make them places in which the young will find their wishes, their best wishes fulfilled and their worst instincts curbed is not going to be popular. I believe in what I am doing, and I also believe in what you are doing, and I believe that we have got something to say.

I think time is still ticking against us, but we have time. It is not going to take backbone in the Agnew sense. It is going to take courage, faith, and a conviction that what we are doing is right.